

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 59
Isaiah 13-27

Key Concepts: These chapters are focused on God as the God of all the nations and not simply of Judah/Israel.

Stories: This section contains an oracle against Babylon, a promise of return from exile, oracles against Assyria, Moab, an alliance between Damascus and Israel, idolatry, Egypt, Babylon, Edom, Arabia, then an interlude about the coming destruction of Jerusalem, more oracles against Shebna and Sidon, and finally the Isaiah "Apocalypse".

Brief Summary: As we will witness with the other two great prophets (Jeremiah and Ezekiel) it is often difficult to discern the historical settings of many prophecies. This is partially so because each of these prophets was active over long periods of time. It is also difficult because many of their prophecies appear to be prophecies in retrospect. In other words, as we will discover with Daniel, the words recorded in their books may be prophecies written at later dates (looking back at past events) and then inserted alongside the original writings.

The majority of this section deals with "the nations" and is seen as a literary unit. One of the great issues with which the monotheistic people of Judah/Israel dealt was the nature of the one God that they were supposed to serve. Was this God the only God? Was this God one among many? Was this God greater than all the other gods if there were other gods? Isaiah answers many of these questions and does so in a way that implies that there is only one God and that that God is the God of Israel. Because of this then, the God of Israel is the God who controls the fate not only of Judah/Israel but the fate of all other nations. It is God who causes nations to rise and fall...according to God's plans for Judah/Israel.

We can see this played out in the oracles against the great empires of Isaiah's day. Isaiah proclaims the destruction of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt along with smaller nations such as Moab. These oracles are remarkable in that they offer us a larger view of history; one that has at its center not merely military and political forces but the will of a God who has a plan for one small nation which is part of the plan for God's entire creation. The benefit of this type of a view is that it 1) gives Judah/Israel hope in the face of overwhelming odds 2) allows Judah/Israel to glimpse the larger picture of God's activities and 3) reminds the people that their current situation is not the end of Judah/Israel.

A second major focus of this section is on God's final consummation of history, or the Isaiah Apocalypse. Apocalypse means "revealing." What Isaiah is doing in chapters 24-27 is revealing a future in which God will not only judge the nations, meaning a universal judgment, bring Judah/Israel home from exile, overcome chaos (represented by the sea dragon Leviathan) but then will also establish God's people while destroying their enemies.

This portion of Isaiah also contains some important phrases and ideas. These include "For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who can annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?" (14:27), "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." (22:13) and "He (God) will swallow up death forever and...will wipe away tears from their faces..." (25:8).

Finally there are some political/theological warnings given about relying on other nations for protection rather than on God. This is an issue because when Judah/Israel relies on other nations she is also relying on their gods, thus demonstrating a lack of trust in YHWH.

1. What do you think of the concept of retrospective prophecy? Why?
2. Where do you see God's hand working in the interactions of the "nations" in our era?
3. Where do you see God's plan being revealed in our time?